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THE BUSINESS OF OFFICE-SEEKING.

SOME fifteen years or more ago a man, long, lean, and leathery, entered the outer office of the Assistant Treasurer of the United States, at New York, and in a voice that told plainly that he came from one of the interior "deestricks" of the State, asked for the Assistant Treasurer. Upon inquiry as to his business with that officer, he said that he was A—— B—— of Cattaraugus, and that he "had called to see 'bout a 'p'intment, 'nef Cattaraugus hed her puppohshin; 'nef she hedn't, he'd like to make applicashin fur her sheer." The chief clerk comprehended the situation quickly, and surmising that the question could be settled with less trouble than is common on such occasions, he asked the visitor to take a seat while an examination was made; whereupon the gentleman from Cattaraugus slowly peeled himself of his overcoat and sat down. It proved to be as the chief clerk had supposed; Cattaraugus *had* her proportion. The record was shown to her representative; whereupon he rose and, silently inserting himself again into his overcoat, went sadly forth to begin his return journey to the remote regions of the Empire State; in the course of which he had time enough to ruminate upon the opportunities and the limitations of office-seeking.

This man was, without a doubt, some village politician, who thought that he had two chances for his "'p'intment": one, his claim upon the party in payment of personal—may we not say professional?—services rendered; the other, Cattaraugus's claim for "her sheer." Nor, according to long-established usage, was there anything ridiculous, or even unreasonable, in his expectation. His departure, without protest or importunity, when he was shown that his county had its full proportion of the clerkships in the New York office, showed that he understood very well what he was about when he made his visit of reconnaissance.

For this matter of proportionate representation in the distribution of what is called Government patronage is one as to which the law is like that of the Medes and Persians. In that blue-book in which are recorded the name, the employment, and the salary of every person in the service of the United States Government there are two columns, in one of which is also recorded the place where each was born, and in the other the State from which he was appointed. A man born in Maine may be appointed from Missouri; that is, having become a citizen of Missouri, he takes what our Cattaraugus friend would call "a sheer of her puppohshin." When Missouri's proportion is filled, the gates are closed against her citizens until one of them vacates his office. This law of the distribution of office is a consequence of the federative and copartnership business character of our general Government, in which the States are individually represented, and upon which they have individual claims, according to their population. The principle is rigidly observed throughout the management of the general Government's affairs. It forbids the nomination of a President and a Vice-President, or of two Cabinet officers, from the same State, just as it does the giving of a county more than its share of the appointments in any one bureau. Absolute and unvarying compliance with this law may not be possible; but its enforcement is sought, and by all politicians the law is not only observed but respected.

This law, like the constitutional requirement that members of Congress, whether in the Senate or in the House of Representatives, shall be residents of the States which they represent, and, like the variation in the several States as to the laws and conditions of marriage, shows that the political entity often called America, but more properly United States of North America, is not in any proper sense of the word a nation. It is even much less so than the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland; for in that, although a diversity as to marriage obtains, so that a woman married in one part of the kingdom may be unmarried in another, representation in the legislature is untrammelled by restraint of place. A member of Parliament has only to be a British subject and chosen by a sufficient constituency. Palmerston, an Irish peer living in London, may represent the Isle of Wight; Gladstone, living also in London, may represent Edinburgh, the capital of another country. Marriage, however, being at the foundation of civilized society, is the supreme test of

nationality. Nothing more socially absurd than to call that a nation in one part of which a woman is married and at the same time in another husbandless—in one part of which a citizen is legitimate, with all consequent rights and privileges, and in another illegitimate, *nullius filius*. The English people are a nation, the Scotch another nation, the Irish another, although they are united in one kingdom, and their union is not federative, and is therefore much closer and more intimate than that of the States which form our Union. In the consideration of the subject now before us, it should never be forgotten that the federal and several character of our Government affects even the composition of our civil service, and that it must necessarily, therefore, affect the question of civil service reform. It cannot cease to do so without a radical change in the nature of our political constitution.

This law in the management of political affairs, and the political condition out of which the law has grown, and by which it is accompanied, have combined with our social habits to make politics and office-seeking a business—a business followed with as single an eye to personal profit and advancement as any other, not even excepting journalism or the Christian ministry. I shall ever remember the remark made to me by a man who held an office of great influence and trust and profit in New York—it was nearly twenty years ago. I spoke to him about his position, and he replied with sadness, almost with bitterness, “I shall never cease to regret the day when I gave up my profession [the law] and went into politics. After all, it don’t pay.” It was the first time that I had heard a man avow plainly that he had taken up politics as a profession, trade, or business, by which he expected to get money. But since then I have heard the same admission in terms, or implicitly, from many others who had “gone into politics.”

That politics should become a business, taken up for profit, was not contemplated by the framers of our system of government. It was supposed by them that there would be always a class of superior, substantial, high-minded men, from whom their less notable fellow-citizens would select those to whose care they would commit the public interests. These men must be paid, of course; for here very few could afford to serve the public unpaid; but it was not supposed that to a man thought worthy of being a legislator or a public officer of position the pay of his office

would be a matter of serious consideration in his determination to enter the public service. The political constitution and the social condition of the country, however, made the unexpected change inevitable. If there had been a leisured class of even very moderate wealth, inherited and staid upon the land, the majority of the legislators and incumbents of high public office would have been selected from this class; and, indeed, some approach to this custom was made in our colonial period in the few years immediately following. But in the absence of such a class, the fact that legislators were paid—paid for their daily services as long as they were in session, and paid also their traveling expenses—made, was sure to make, could not, without the abrogation of human nature, fail to make, politics a business, followed merely for its mingled return of money-profit and personal influence. And as in trade the inferior and cheaper article always drives out the superior, and in money the debased coin or the paper promise surely and soon supplants the standard, so in our trading politics the inferior man—man inferior intellectually, socially, morally—very soon began to displace his superior, until, about thirty years ago, we had reached a level at which a man like William Tweed might reasonably hope to sit in the Senate of the United States, to represent the Government of the United States at one of the first capitals of Europe, and even to be President. That it was so, no well-informed person will for a moment dispute.

Now, in referring to this notorious person as an example and an illustration, I have not in mind his colossal robberies. Let us set them aside, and suppose that he was as honest as a Turkish porter or a Cuban slaver (both men who can be trusted with open bags of untold gold), and then, what manner of man was he to hold an honorable and an eminent position in the public service of a great people? To him, and to his like, the descent—I will not say from Washington and John Adams and Alexander Hamilton, and their like; let us pass by the heroes—but from John Quincy Adams, from De Witt Clinton, from Daniel Webster, with all his faults, and from the men among whom they were only the first in position and in power—this descent is like a descent from heaven into hell. And yet we all know that as those men were but the eminent representatives of a class among whom our legislators and public officers were sought, so he was only the most successful (because the most daring and

unscrupulous) of a class of professional politicians who, ignorant, coarse, low-bred, and low-lived, were rapidly taking entire possession and control of our public affairs.

This, too, was inevitable. In a community in which the vote of every man who is not yet in prison counts one, and no more, as soon as the mass of men discover their political power, they will use it for their own personal advantage. They will send to their legislature, not the man of the best ability and education, of the most sterling character and the most dignified bearing; they will send him who will flatter their personal vanity and serve their private interests. They will have their eyes open chiefly to the latter point; but they will also find a pleasure in setting aside the superior man in favor of one of themselves—not always the man with the smoothest tongue, but generally him of the fewest scruples. Hence it is that within the last thirty years our legislative bodies have deteriorated so notably that now even the Senate of the United States, which is filled not by a popular vote, but by that of legislative bodies, contains men whose presence there or even in much inferior positions would have been morally impossible in the days of our fathers. We may deplore this, but we cannot help it. That it is so is no special evidence of moral or intellectual deterioration in our people. It is merely that political power has passed into the hands to which, under our political constitution and with our conditions of society, it was inevitably tending, and that they who possess it are using it, so far as they are able, for their own personal pleasure and profit, and not for the good of the whole country.*

It is also inevitable that the man who gives up a profession or a business, and “goes into politics,” will soon seek other compensation than his salary for the sacrifice he has made to the

* Mr. Dorman B. Eaton, in his interesting history of civil service and its reform in Great Britain—a work which, notwithstanding its intrinsic merit, has little applicability to the politics and society of the United States—says: “Nothing has more significantly illustrated the growth and predominance of partisan theories and habits in this country during this generation than the many officers originally appointable, which are now elective. It was natural that the people should think their direct choice would secure better officers than the spoils system of appointment” (p. 390). Not so: what was thought of, what was sought, was not better officers, but officers who would be directly under the thumbs and at the beck and call of the men on whose votes their tenure of office depended.

public interests ; and he will not be long in finding it. The immense and rapidly circulating wealth of the country, and the many vast business projects which are more or less affected by legislation, make money-getting by politics easy if not sure. Hence it is that very few men have taken an active part for any length of time in our general, or even in our State, politics during the last thirty years without becoming at least moderately rich ; unless, indeed, they were rich when they entered the political arena, and did so to further their own interests and those of the great corporations of which they were members.

Politics cannot, however, be thus made a business unless it is made profitable, in some degree, at least, to all who take an active part in it. The men who furnish the force which the political leaders direct, must be paid, in one way or another, for their time, their trouble, and their enthusiasm. It is not to be expected that in a country in which there is not only no governing class, but no class of recognized superiority, men will do the work of politicians who, except for a success due to mere popular favor, are no better than themselves, and see the leaders profit, while they, whose favor makes those leaders what they are, stand without the public garner and get nothing. Politics has thus become a business for all who take any part in it. Office, opportunity of profit, position, or advancement of some kind, is looked for by all of that large class who are known among their friends as politicians. Even when they do not directly seek office, these men, when their party is in power, expect (to use a phrase common among their sort) "to have their share of what's going." In many cases all that they expect is opportunity for money-getting in some way ; and in a country of such great wealth, such vast and yet undeveloped resources, such business activity, and such numerous public projects as this, those who control public affairs have in their hands means of rewarding political friendship not inferior at least to those of the absolute monarchs of past ages. Rewards of this sort are generally expected by and bestowed upon the more important and socially reserved class of politicians. In this class, however, there are some who, in return for their money and their countenance, expect positions that will add to their importance ; and there are many who are satisfied by pensioning upon the public incompetent and otherwise objectionable members of their own families, who otherwise would be pensioned upon them. The mass, however,

of the active politicians—those who serve on minor committees, work in political clubs, help to get up public meetings and “demonstrations,” and generally do the work that tells at the polls on election day, look for office of some sort. They do their work as other men do theirs, for the return it brings them. If there were no pay or no hope of pay, there would soon be no work done.*

Hence it is that every prominent politician has followers who must be rewarded. He rewards them, if he can do so, by obtaining for them some public office with as little to do and as much to receive as possible; and when he cannot do this, which not unfrequently happens, he rewards them out of his own pocket. Mr. Morrissey—the Honorable John Morrissey, prize-fighter, professional gambler, and Member of Congress; (and we all know that there have been worse men in Congress than he)—being asked the secret of political success, replied, “Stick to your friends, and be free with your money.” A similar reply was made to a similar question by a prominent political leader in New York, who is of Mr. Morrissey’s nationality, but of very different habits of life. And who that has means of knowing will doubt that William Tweed’s political strength lay in his ability to draw after him a multitudinous clientage by hope of reward? Nor were his followers and flatterers confined to the inferior population of the great city that he ruled, or even to successful political adventurers. The men who sought him as a fellow director in their corporate enterprises, and who lent him their names to bolster his political position, were men who could serve him in one way much as he could serve them in another. Should it ever be forgotten that a bronze statue of William Tweed was about to be erected in New York, and that the gentlemen who proposed to set up this brazen

* It may not be generally known—I for one did not suspect it until I learned it from a man who had long been seeking a minor office (and my after observation confirmed his information)—that men who have or are supposed to have influence at Washington, or with such official persons as the Post-Master of New York, or the Police Commissioners, are now very generally paid by those office-seekers in whose favor they use their influence successfully; the amount of the *honorarium* (let us above all things be exquisite in our phraseology) depending upon the amount of the salary obtained. This is not regarded by either party as bribery, or “anything at all out of the way,” but as mere commission on business done. The whole matter stands on a business footing.

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image—if his own face could have been but molten down for it!—were themselves—some of them, at least—not unknown or unhonored among their fellow-citizens!*

Now, the worst fact in relation to Tweed was not himself, but the condition of society that made a Tweed possible. For do we not all know, do we not all feel with a moral certainty, that Mr. Tweed's clientage, or the greater part of it, suspected, and more than suspected, that he was filling his pockets (and some of theirs) with public money dishonestly obtained, and that even if they (his fellow-directors and committee-men included) had certainly known, by secret information, that it was so, they would have held their peace and have given him their votes and their voices, and even their hands, so long as he was not exposed publicly, and so long as they received their compensation—what the Cattaraugus man called their "sheer"—whether it was money, or opportunity for money-getting, or office, or a participation in the orgies of the Americus Club? We do know all this sufficiently. or else we are willfully blind or stupidly ignorant.

In a country whose politics are at this moral level, and in which there are at least two hundred thousand offices to be distributed by the general government and by the States, is it strange that office-seeking has become a business, followed for the most part by men who are not the ablest, or the most admirable and estimable members of the community, men of whom, as a whole, Guiteau is not indeed a fair representative, but whom, as a class, he does in some sort represent? Nay, must we not rather confess that that unlovely creature, the habitual office-seeker, is as natural a product of our political and social condition as the scrub-oak is of the soil which has been laid waste by the removal of the primeval forest? He has become a necessary part of our political machinery, an important part; and, all circumstances being taken into consideration, it would be unreasonable to find fault with the party leaders for using him. Even statesmen of the higher sort find that the most and the best that they can do

* See the New York newspapers of 17th March, 1871. Among those who proposed to erect this monument were A. Oakey Hall, Mayor of New York, H. W. Genet, State Senator, Albert Cardozo, Judge of the Supreme Court, Richard O'Gorman, Corporation Counsel, W. E. Roberts, Member of Congress, Isaac Bell, Commissioner of Charities, and Charles P. Daly, First Judge of the Common Pleas.

is to use the motives and direct the forces of the world around them as it is,—to manage their world, not to make it. How much more imperative is this necessity upon the politician whose task is limited to the simple effort to get his party into power, or to keep it there!

Nor shall we err if we recognize among those who look for and desire official position of a certain sort some who are of a character much superior to the commonly entertained notion of the office-seeking class. Aspiration to political place and power is not in itself to be either contemned or condemned; and it is not only natural but right that the man who has political influence, and who uses it to the advantage of his party, should desire, and should receive, some benefit and outward investiture as the stamp of his success and the recognition of his standing; quite as natural and as right as that he who ministers at the altar shall live by the altar. The existence of such aspiration among the better class of young men who are inclined to politics furnishes the astute and mature politician with his most efficient tools. The working of this motive is somewhat in this wise:

A rising young lawyer, in a small town in—well, let us take the first and topmost State upon the map—Maine, attends a political meeting, and being tempted to propose or to oppose some measure in the interests of his party, is successful, and is talked about; and soon, when some local election is approaching, he goes up to town and calls upon the leader of his party, whom we may as well call Mr. Maine, and telling him of the condition of things, says that he hopes that he may be able to do something for the success of the party, and modestly hints at his former little success. Whereupon the great leader, who probably never heard his name before, beams out upon him, and perhaps laying his hand upon his shoulder, says: “Oh, you need not tell me anything about that. Do you suppose that I am ignorant of your brilliant success in that affair? We have had our eyes upon you for some time past, and look to you as just the man to sustain the party in the present important and delicate political crisis at Punkinton. If you will only take the matter earnestly in hand, I am sure that you will carry us through triumphantly.” Whereat a bolt of delight shoots through that young Punkintonian’s heart, and he says within himself, “Good land! has the great Mr. Maine had his eyes on me, and for some time, and does he look to me to carry us through at Punkinton!” Then

goes he forth from before Mr. Maine with his face shining and his pulses bounding, and straightway takes the road to Punkinton, where he goes to work, and works to the loss of sleep and the loss of business, and, being a cleverish fellow and popular, he carries his point. Then comes a letter of congratulation from the great Mr. Maine, with intimations that if he, Mr. Maine, should ever be elevated, by the choice of his fellow-citizens, to a position in which he should require the services of discreet counselors and persuasive advocates, his eyes must needs involuntarily turn toward Punkinton. Whereupon that young man declares in his heart that a statesman of such insight and such capacity of appreciation, one so altogether admirable, shall not lack his services toward his elevation to a position in which he would need the services of a discreet counselor and a persuasive advocate. He works on until he becomes the leading Democratic or Republican politician in his county; and, finding his business about to give up him, he gives up his business and goes into politics. The great Mr. Maine—who still has his eye on Punkinton and sends thither some of his lieutenants, nay, perhaps even goes there himself and beams and breathes upon his acolyte and his followers—is at last elevated and so-forth and so-forth! He becomes Governor of his State, or perhaps United States Senator; and then, to the surprise of Punkinton, various bits of patronage well understood to be at his disposal are given, not to the hero who saved Punkinton from the jaws of the opposition, but to unheard-of nobodies in some obscure part of the State. The young politician, now not so young nor quite so modest as he was when we first met him, seeks the great man in his elevation and recounts his services, and the bland and cheering promises of his patron. “My dear sir,” he hears in reply, “you cannot suppose that the party or that I am ignorant of the inestimable service which your labors and your brilliant talents have rendered us; or that they are destined in due time to have their *fitting* reward. These little scraps of patronage that have been recently distributed are not fit for a man of your pretensions. We are looking forward to greater things, and it is not impossible”—with a dignified assumption of modesty—“that I may be called upon to advise in regard to some important appointments really not unworthy of the consideration of such a man as you have shown yourself to be; and then you may count surely upon my best services and most grateful memory.” Back he goes to Punkinton, somewhat heavy-

hearted indeed, but with hope new-kindled in his bosom, and there he works for party and patron, the former always implying the latter; and indeed he can do nothing else, for he is committed to him body and soul. He has sold himself to Mr. Maine for hopes and promises, and has so bound himself to him in the eyes of all his little world that he must continue his servant and slave, not only for consistency's sake but necessity's; for he has given up his business and gone into politics. And there we leave him.

The country is full of Punkintons and their leading politicians; and Mr. Maine may be found, in some stage of development, in every State of the Union. Pennsylvania has him no less than New York, Georgia no less than Ohio. Nor is he a new creation of our times or our country. He has lived in every country that has had both politics and liberty; for he does not flourish under despotism. Doubtless, there were Maines in China before the days of Confucius. What is peculiar to us in the condition of public affairs which has just been set forth is that it must needs be. There is no ridding ourselves of it without a radical change in the structure of our politics and our society—unless, indeed, we are able to eliminate the trifling element human nature from our problem. With those who cannot see this, it would be quite useless to argue. All that we can hope to do for the elevation and the purification of our politics in this respect, it would seem, is to be obtained only by the removal of the political plunder. The carcass must be put not only out of the reach of the eagles, but out of their sight. So long as two hundred thousand offices are continually to be distributed and redistributed in a country in which one man is as good as another, and every man's vote counts one and no more, there will be at least ten seekers after every one of the two hundred thousand;—a noble army indeed, if it were composed of the choicest members of society. The effect of all which upon the country is deplorable—morally, intellectually, politically, socially, materially.*

* As I myself held a place—one of very small importance—in the public service for many years, a denunciation of office-seeking on my part makes it almost necessary for me to say that I did not ask for my appointment, nor seek it in any way. It was offered to me unexpectedly, and given specifically on the ground that I was a man of letters, who had done the State some little service, and who might be expected to do it a little more. I was requested to

A general consciousness of the shabby and depressing condition of our civil service, and of the reproach it brings upon us, finds its expression in what is called a "movement" for civil service reform. It is now generally felt by thoughtful and decent people that this making the minor offices of the Federal and State Governments the spoils of party victory is a custom constantly working toward political corruption and social degradation; and there is naturally a very strong desire among such people that the custom may be done away with. This feeling has been seized upon by some politicians and pæne-politicians, and made the key-note of a political cry, which the leaders of each of the great political parties fear somewhat to hear as a slogan on the side of their opponents, but much more to find it adopted as a creed upon their own. Their natural apprehensions are, however, in this case too quickly excited. For here they—the political leaders on whichever side—are masters of the situation. A mere public sentiment upon a matter of the minor morals, however widely diffused, is not to be compared as an active force to the ravening hunger of a vast body of men, each eagerly intent upon his own personal interest. The desire felt by all who value political purity and public decency must, in the nature of things, be a languid motive power in comparison with the empty greed of two million office-seekers, and the terrible necessities of some hundreds or thousands of party leaders to have wherewithal to stop their mouths and fill their bellies. Leading politicians, indeed, will not wisely seem indifferent to the necessity of civil service reform; but they may, without much fear of unattonable offense, neglect it, or manipulate it to suit their own necessities.

Nevertheless, the question as to the bettering and cleansing of our civil service is to those who are not politicians, and who

go through the form of making an application, and my sponsors were Gulian Verplanck, Luther Bradish, William Curtis Noyes, George Templeton Strong, Horace Greeley, Dr. Bellows, Dr. Chapin, and Henry Ward Beecher; the letter of recommendation having been written by my friend Mannsell B. Field, at the dictation of Mr. Bradish. After three or four years' service I was promoted (to the enormous salary of \$2,000 a year) upon the unsolicited recommendation of my superior officer, Assistant-Collector (then acting collector) Clinch, whom I had not known before my appointment, and with whom my relations were then official only. Not long ago I came upon a copy of Mr. Bradish's letter of recommendation, on which I had irreverently scrawled, "Great cry and little wool."

yet give thought to political affairs, one of very great importance. All such persons feel, and have long felt, that the general office-seeking habit of which such crimes as Guiteau's and such men as Guiteau are the natural outcome (for there is no wisdom in blinking the latter fact), is so degrading in its influence that it should be broken up, if possible, at whatever cost of the efficiency of mere party machinery.* The efforts toward this much desired end thus far, although they have resulted in "movement," in "agitation," both of a somewhat vague form and uncertain operation, and even in "association,"—not, I take it, of a strongly coherent nature,—seem to have the fault of ignoring three things: first, the political organization of the country; next, its social and moral condition; and last, not least, human nature—three forces of a sort not to be set aside easily and with a high hand at this or at any other time, in this or in any other country. If we are to have a Presidential election every four years, with elections of members of Congress every second year, and State elections for Governor and State Senators and what not, and town and city elections no less often, and there are two hundred thousand offices to be distributed by the Federal and the State Governments, you cannot, while human nature remains what it is, prevent the distribution of those offices by the leading men of the party in power among their supporters but in two ways: One, the depriving them (by a law that can be enforced) of the power of thus rewarding their successful partisans, which (our political constitution and modes of public action remaining what they are) would inevitably lead to a greater corruption in legislation for the purpose of supplying the place and the motive power of "patronage"; the other the

* In his introduction to Mr. Dorman B. Eaton's book (heretofore referred to), Mr. George William Curtis says that the civil service reform movement was begun by Mr. Thomas Allen Jenckes, a representative in Congress from Rhode Island from 1863-71, whose attention and that of many others "had been drawn to the subject at the close of the war."

If Mr. Curtis had read some articles upon the subject which appeared in the "*Courier and Enquirer*" before 1861, and a letter upon it, signed "A Yankee," which appeared in the London "*Spectator*" a considerable time before the end of the war, he would probably have set back the hand of his dial a few years. I am sure that he would at least regard their writer as now entitled to speak again upon the question, and as one who has not taken it up lightly or newly.

allowing this power to remain in the hands of the party leaders, but modifying and limiting its operation in a way that would diminish the interest which the office-seeking class takes in politics, or rather in party agitation. With all who believe that the endless turmoil of party strife and bickering in which we live, of which the one motive and the one point of public interest seems to be possession of office,* has a tendency, strong and sure, to make the tone of our public affairs frivolous, and sordid, and corrupt, and who would gladly see the energy of our people turned to higher, better, more useful, and happier endeavors, there can be no doubt which of these alternatives is to be preferred. What a blessing would it be to the country if that political condition which is figured in the fact that one President is hardly in the White House before political journalists begin to discuss who shall be his successor, and pæne-politicians hasten to nominate some man, upon whom they set up the claim of discovery—if the condition of which this is the sign could be so changed that people might be compelled to rest for some little while, say only two or three years, from squabbling over offices, and have time between the periods of party strife to give themselves to some of the nobler and better objects of human endeavor, or even to the hearty and intelligent enjoyment of life, which Americans do less than any other people under the sun, and thus to elevate themselves above the position of mediocre money-getters and petty party politicians.

Nor is the connection of office-seeking with party politics the worst of it. It is bad in itself. It is the sign of existing weakness and evil, and the cause of more. That in a country like this, so vast, and rich, and free that men swarm to it from all the old folk-hives of the earth,—that here there should be a considerable body of young men, intelligent, and even moderately educated, who are ready to take up with little offices of routine duty, bringing in a few hundreds, or at most a thousand or two a year, with no stimulus to enterprise, no reward for exertion, is in itself shameful; it is a reproach upon our society which cannot be

* See the newspapers for four months before and four months after the accession of Mr. Garfield—see them ever since the accession of General Arthur. The news from Washington is always about offices; always that, and little else.

gainsaid.* What we need for the preservation of our self-respect, no less than for the purification of our politics and the elevation of our civil service, is the extinction of this widely diffused seeking for office, so that a young man with health and strength and life before him will not think of seeking, hardly of accepting, one of those numberless minor public positions the routine duties of which may be satisfactorily and fitly performed by men of maturer years, to whom character and ability and industry have not brought success; and how many such men there are, only the charitable and dispassionate observer of life can know.

To bring about this most desirable end, and at the same time to elevate our civil service, there could be no better means than the destruction of the business of office-seeking. Now, one great defect of the proposed system of reform by appointment to the lowest grade of office upon competitive examination, and to higher only from the lower grades, is that it perpetuates the business of office-seeking, and not only so, but raises it into the position of a recognized occupation, almost into that of a profession, with teachers, examiners, and degrees. What our politics and our society need in this respect is the turning of all men's eyes away from the two hundred thousand offices, and the causing them to look only to the independent action of their own hands and heads for the making of their living and their success in living. On the contrary, competitive examination makes office-seeking a career into which it tempts young men who, by the healthy operation of the natural laws of society, should be engaged in agriculture, in the mechanical arts, in trade or (a very few of them) in the learned professions.

Upon the question as to the worth of competitive examination as a means of providing the fittest men for the public service, I shall say little, merely remarking that the ablest, most sagacious, most trusted, and longest experienced public officer that ever was

* A Washington correspondent writing in the performance of his regular function presented this pretty sketch from real life to his readers, a short time ago :

"General Grant has been greatly annoyed by office-holders while in Washington. On Friday morning there was a collection of twenty-five or thirty of them at the front door of the White House, waiting for the General to finish his breakfast and go out for a walk. Among them were Congressmen, officers of the army, and clergymen, each one having his ax to be ground, and they paced to and fro beneath the portico in anxious expectation. Finally, about 11 o'clock, one of the doorkeepers told them that General Grant had gone down through the kitchen an hour previous, and walked away from the back door in the direction of Pennsylvania Avenue. The waiters dispersed without ceremony."

in the civil service of the United States, Charles P. Clinch, for sixteen years Deputy Collector, and for twenty-one years Assistant Collector, of the port of New York,* said to me, on the introduction of the competitive examination test, that he could not pass the proposed examination for the lowest grade, and that he was sure that his ablest subordinates could not pass it, although "some of the fools might"; and that such examinations, although they might find certain men who knew certain things, would not discover, could not discover, did not pretend to discover, the fitness of men for their positions in the long run.

On the other hand, appointment to the lowest grade of the service only, and only upon competitive examination, with appointment to higher grades only by promotions from the lower, deprives the Government of the services of mature and experienced men, who are quite capable of the duties of the higher places, but who cannot afford to begin at the bottom. Moreover, it also deprives successful party leaders of a means of rewarding political activity, which, *if used in a proper way*, is becoming to them, and a fitting and not unsafe stimulus to political action. And it may be seriously doubted whether, in a country where all politicians work for pay and must continue to do so, the best and most honest of them will consent to be wholly deprived of the privilege of recommending their supporters to office.†

Is there no way of reconciling these conflicting forces, not only with each other, but with the conditions of our politics and our society? It seems to me that there is, and that the much

* The numbers of these years may be not exactly correct; nor is it of any importance that they should be. The important fact is that Mr. Clinch, after being in the Legislature of New York at a time when men like Verplanck and Bradish and Ruggles were to be found there, was for thirty-seven years in the service of the United States as Deputy Collector and Assistant Collector. Always a Democrat of the Democrats, he was honored and trusted whichever party was in power.

† One of the most astute and experienced of British critics of politics and society, A. Hayward, remarking upon the fault found with Stendhal's (Henri Bayle's) personal friends for not doing more for him when they were in power, says: "It should be remembered that a party is a combination of persons who unite their talents and resources upon an understanding that, in case of success, the power and patronage thereby acquired shall be shared amongst them. There is nothing necessarily wrong in such a league; because those forming it may fairly claim credit for confidence in one another's honesty and capacity, as well as for having fixed principles to carry out."

desired elevation of the civil service might be brought about by very simple means—in fact, by the operation of usages and laws already well known in the service, with the addition of only one new provision; and that thus the end in view might be attained by the least disturbance of existing conditions—a method of reform always sought by prudent and practical statesmen. And although those with whom civil service reform has become the one great crying need of the time and the country, and who, like most professional reformers, clamorously insist upon the paramount virtue of their nostrum for the public weal, may turn away with disgust from any remedy which does not tear away offenses with the uprooting and the pang and the outerying of dentistry, and which merely secures the end without violence on the one side, or the glory of a splendid operation on the other, the better part of the public, we may be sure, would welcome the quieter and more natural process.

Competitive examination—a bad method for making choice or determining fitness for any practical purpose, and weighted also politically with other inconveniences—may or may not be adopted as the only entrance to the civil service of the United States; but supposing it rejected, are we to assume that there should not be, or that there would not be, any examination at all as to fitness for the service? Not so. I have found, however, that most of those who have given this subject some consideration, without being well informed upon it, have assumed that, until the administration of President Hayes, there was no examination for appointees to the civil service, and that they were accepted without question on the nomination of party leaders. It may have been so, in fact, in too many instances; but if it were so, every case was a violation of the rules and usages of the service as then and now existing—an example of one of those prevailing abuses from the existence of which nothing can be inferred against right use.

Here follows a section of the general regulations issued in February, 1857, by the then Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Guthrie, which directly touches our subject:

“577. The Collector should direct, in each case, a *thorough examination* of the applicant by experts in the department or branch of business in which he is proposed to be employed, of whom one shall be the *head of the department* (or branch of business), who will certify in writing the result of such examination, and the Collector will forward such certificate to the Department with

the nomination. In no case will it be permitted to an officer of the customs to appoint, as one of his subordinates, a surety on his official bond."

This regulation was properly in force (whether operative or not) in New York until the recent adoption of the new system, and is, I believe, now so in force elsewhere. The result of compliance with this order was a certificate, of which here follows a copy of the blank form :

"CUSTOM HOUSE, NEW YORK,
"COLLECTOR'S OFFICE, — *th* Division,
"_____, _____, 186—.

"Sir : At your request we have examined _____ as to his qualifications for the office of _____, and report that in our opinion he is [or is not] qualified to perform the duties of that office.

"Very respectfully,
"_____

"To _____, Esq.,
"Collector of the Customs."

Attached to this was a memorandum of the age, place of birth, residence, and occupation of the appointee. A blank order of examination (of which I have in vain sought a copy) once existed, and this order, in the case of appointees to inferior positions, was issued to the head of the department or bureau only to which they were severally nominated. It was, as I recollect (for I have received such orders), merely a formal but brief request to the head of the bureau that he would examine the bearer as to his fitness for such or such a position under him, and report the result to the Collector.

Now, it needs hardly to be said that all that is required to determine the fitness of an appointee to office is a faithful compliance with this order. Under a proper administration of public affairs, it is to the superior officer's interest that he should make the examination sufficiently thorough to satisfy himself. For such an administration makes the head of every bureau and department personally responsible for the efficient operation of his office. The work of his subordinates is his work; and for any defect in it he is liable to be called to account. He is, therefore, the person of all others to whom the efficiency and the proper official conduct of his subordinates is most important. The Treasury order making him always one of the examiners is dictated by common sense. If obeyed, it insures, as far as possible, fitness in the candidate, discipline, smooth and easy work-

ing in the business of the office—in brief, orderly and efficient administration.

That this mode of examination is sufficient for its purpose, and that it can be used as a protection against political influence, I know by experience. On one occasion, when an assistant was needed in the little bureau of which I was for some years the head, a young man presented himself with one of the orders just mentioned. I examined him and kept him under my eye for one morning, and then sent him with a letter to the Collector, saying that he was not fit for the place. Next day another came, with the same result; and then another and another, until I had sent back five, one of whom was a kinsman of a very influential person indeed, as he let me know, with a little flourish. When I next presented myself to my superior officer, he had hardly bid me good morning when he asked me, using the dry point, if I insisted on having only Harvard graduates in my office. "No, Mr. Collector," I replied; "but I do say that a young man who takes that place should know how to copy and address a letter correctly, how to make a simple calculation, and how to behave himself to his superior officer and to strangers, which not one of those you sent me did." He hesitated a moment, and then, ruefully smiling, said: "You are right; and you shall have your man. But if you knew how I am pressed by politicians to find places, you wouldn't wonder at my sending you anything that goes on two legs." Within a few days another person was sent, who proved fit and took the position, the duties of which he performed satisfactorily for some years.

I have told this story because it seemed to me to present the whole case in a nut-shell. Faithful personal examination by the superior officer is, under existing Treasury regulations, all that is necessary to protect the service against the effect of political pressure. There remains, however, one very important question: How shall Collectors, and other superior officers, Secretaries of Departments, Presidents of the United States themselves, be protected against this political pressure for places? For, so long as there are places that may be had, or hoped for, by pressure, politicians, big and little, will press for them. So long as heads of minor bureaus will accept subordinates on mere nomination by their superior, without examination and notwithstanding manifest unfitness, Collectors and other like officers will, at political urging, send them anything that goes on two legs.

The remedy here is simply fixity of tenure during good behavior. Let it be once established that places are not to be had—that is, to be made—by pressure, and party leaders will cease, must needs cease, to press. Let it be established that an efficient and well-conducted civil officer is not to be removed except for cause specifically alleged, and politicians will recommend only upon a vacancy.

As to the conduct of politicians in this respect, I feel that I am able to speak with some knowledge. Having held my position seventeen years,* under eight successive collectors, with all of whom I was in more or less confidential relations, and four of whom were my personal friends, I knew much of what went on which was not strictly public business. Moreover, I was one of the commission appointed by General Arthur, then Collector, in 1878, on the reduction of force in the New York Custom House, upon orders from the Treasury Department — part of a movement which some cynical persons declared would result in the elevation of Mr. John Sherman to the Presidency, and the political extinction of General Arthur — erroneously, as it proved. The other members of this Commission were the late Samuel G. Ogden, for thirty-seven years Auditor of the Customs in New York, and Col. MacMahon, Chief Clerk of the Fifth Division.† I believe that we all accepted our places on this ungrateful commission with great reluctance. Certainly I did so, and endeavored to be freed from it; but under the circumstances we could not refuse our services to the Collector. We all knew, of course, that in cases of removal we should be subjected to personal abuse, for which we cared little, and also to personal solicitation, which we dreaded; and we formally pledged ourselves to each other in the beginning that we would hold no correspondence, by word of mouth or by letter, with any unofficial person on that subject. Interviews we would decline; letters we should leave unanswered. I am sure that the pledge was kept by all of us; and we had need of its protection. Protest and petition poured in upon us; I, as secretary, naturally suffering the most. Out of all this stood forth

* I had nothing to do directly with the collection of the customs, and the Collector was my only superior officer — all persons in the district connected with the Treasury being his subordinates.

† Col. MacMahon won his epaulets, not without loss of part of what he staked, himself, in our Civil War. He has proved as efficient in the civil as he was in the military service of the Union.

one remarkable fact. Although as the result of our report some two hundred men in the Custom House proper were displaced,* *not one protest or petition came to us from a politician*; all were from "outsiders," highly respectable and influential (that is, wealthy) men, who had friends or kinsmen in the service, and who protested against this displacement of the representatives of so much respectability. We continued our course, guided only by the Collector's instructions and the requirements of the service as they appeared to us, aided in our inquiry by deputy-collectors and chief clerks of divisions. Then these highly respectable protesters, who were not politicians, moved heaven and earth against us, and caused us to be summoned to Washington to account for our misdeeds; which accounting was made to such purpose that that part of the embroilment was never heard of afterward.†

Such, according to my years of observation, is the attitude and the action in this respect of the "machine politician," for whom those who know anything of me will not accuse me of any special liking, at least because he is a politician and a part of the ma-

* I speak from memory only.

† It is pertinent to the subject of this article that I should say here that, during the action of this Commission on the reduction of force, the Collector (General Arthur) refrained entirely from making any suggestions as to his own wishes or those of his political friends, in regard to individuals. The changes were left entirely in the hands of the Commission, the members of which were guided only by the orders from the department and the exigencies of the public service, as revealed to them upon inquiries addressed to the heads and chief clerks of divisions. It was not until the Commission presented its carefully, I may say painfully, prepared schedule of reduction to Collector Arthur, that he had any consultation with them as to the particular results of their labors; and even then his suggestions were few, and were offered merely as suggestions. I, for one, was surprised at his reserve in this respect. But I remember one suggestion of change made by him, which I shall venture at this distance of time to make public. The Commission had placed, for good reason, upon the schedule of removal in one Division, a name as to which the Collector demurred. At first he merely requested that, if there must be a reduction in that office, some other name should be substituted. When he was told that good reason existed for the choice that had been made, he explained that a member of the family of the clerk in question had been his opponent and assailant, and that he wished therefore to treat this gentleman with exceptional leniency. This was the only case in which he pressed his personal wishes upon the Commission; and he requested that there might be nothing said that would inform his censor of his action in the matter. Nothing, I believe, has ever been said about it until now, when that may be told which happened *consule Planco*.

chine. He does his best for his client; but if his man is removed for good cause, personal or political, he submits without protest—it is the fortune of war. Whereas, your highly respectable non-politician, whose unfortunate or inefficient kinsman or near friend, once quartered on the Government, is removed and thrown upon his hands for aid or support, rends the skies with his denunciation of political corruption, and would know (in a very impressive manner) how the public service is to be kept pure and sweet if he is not to be allowed to salt it with a sprinkling of his family and friends.

Hence it seems clear that the leading politician, if not the non-politician and the pæne-politician, would be satisfied and yield gracefully if the permitted recommendation for appointment to office, were it little or much, were left in his hands as a part of the prestige of his position. The party leader in Congress who knew that his right to recommend appointees for every vacancy occurring in the contingent of his district—our Cattaraugus friend's "pūppohshin"—was recognized, and would be respected in so far as to place his nominee under examination for fitness, would be content with such a recognition of his position and prestige—a recognition surely not unbecoming, so far as he is concerned. And as to the man to be appointed from his district, to whom could inquiries as to his general qualifications be addressed with more propriety than to his representative in Congress? By the adoption of the rule of tenure during efficiency and good behavior, the party leaders' scope of recommendation would indeed be diminished; but in that diminution he would find actual relief, while, at the same time, he would not be entirely deprived of a valued and distinguishing privilege, which, rightly used, is not without its proper benefits to all parties interested in it, not excepting the public. The adoption of the rule of tenure during good behavior and efficiency would, on the one hand, relieve party leaders and heads of departments of the pressure of a crowd of office-seekers, and on the other, of course, break up the business of office-seeking. The two million locusts of office, who now darken the sky of half a continent, would be compelled to seek some other way of getting their living; and the spurious and debasing political activity, which is stimulated by the hope of getting some sort of profit from party success, would be gradually ended by the gradual failure of its motive power.

One result of the adoption of the law of fixity of tenure

would be the restoration of the members of the civil service to their normal place in politics and their constitutional rights as citizens. Members of opposite parties who were in the civil service would not only vote and work, each with his own party, but contribute to it or not as they felt inclined, with none to molest or to make them afraid, just as if they were engaged in any other occupation. As to saying to the officers of the civil service that they shall not take any part in politics, and that they shall not give money in aid of any political cause or party, that is a feeble sort of tyranny that need not be discussed at this stage of political freedom. It is a gross outrage, a more intolerable restraint upon personal liberty than that proposed in the time of James I. by Oliver St. John, who, to attain an end perhaps good in itself, would have deprived the people of the right of individually offering the King money.

Thus a reform involving little change in our political habits, and the violation of none of the harmonies of our political and social condition—examination of appointees by heads of departments or their chosen representatives, responsibility of those officers for their subordinates, and fixity of tenure during efficiency and good behavior—would seem to be sure means for the attainment of this much-desired end.

RICHARD GRANT WHITE.